

VZCZCXRO1426
RR RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHOS #0474/01 3431408
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 091408Z DEC 09
FM AMCONSUL LAGOS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1105
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA 0660
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC
RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

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SIPDIS

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USDOJ FOR MARIE-FLORE KOUAME

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ECON EAGR EAID EFIS PGOV NI

SUBJECT: NIGER DELTA YOUTH TRAINED IN FISH FARMING

REF: A. 08 LAGOS 398

1B. 09 LAGOS 95

SUMMARY

11. Over 579 Niger Delta youth have been trained in catfish and shrimp farming since the beginning of this year by the Nigerian Institute for Oceanography and Marine Research (NIOMR). NIOMR has the capacity to train more youth and make a major contribution to post-amnesty skill acquisition training for former militants. The high demand for fish and insufficient domestic production would create jobs for youths and former militants in aquaculture. The training of these youths and other stakeholders in fish farming would increase domestic production and improve the living conditions of many Nigerians, who rely on fish for their protein. Nigerian researchers are seeking ways to genetically improve the quality and yield of the African catfish, which is easy to cultivate and high in protein. NIOMR has asked for assistance in locating partner universities in the United States. END SUMMARY

NIOMR TRAINS NIGER DELTA YOUTH

12. NIOMR has a mandate to provide vocational training in fisheries and aquaculture to eight coastal states under its jurisdiction. NIOMR established other training centers in Aluu and Buguma in River State, Badore in Lagos State, and Sapele in Delta State as the demand for its services increased. NIOMR's principal catfish researcher Rahman Oguntade said the institute, in collaboration with the Niger Delta Development Commission (NNDC), has trained over 440 young people from the Delta in catfish farming techniques at the Aluu training center alone since the beginning of this year. NIOMR can make a substantive contribution in skills acquisition for former militants.

13. Fish Technology and Biotechnology Department Head Dr. Gbola Akande added that the NIOMR headquarters in Lagos has also trained 139 unemployed Niger Delta youth on fish farming under the GON's National Food Security Program (NFSP), which

aims to train 10,000 unemployed youth each year from all over the country in different occupations. The NFSP training on catfish at NIOMR runs for a period of six weeks. NIOMR Executive Director Dr. Ayinla said the FG gives each student a stipend of 10,000 naira (\$70) every month for one year. He explained that after the six weeks of training at NIOMR, program graduates are sent to existing catfish farms in their states of origin to improve their skills on catfish and shrimp farming. The federal government provides a severance loan at the end of one year to enable establishment of their own farms.

AFRICAN CATFISH IS PREFERRED

¶4. About 50 percent of the animal protein intake in Nigeria comes from fish, of which catfish is the preferred species. The African catfish is easy to cultivate and high in protein and other essential nutrients according to Oguntade. More than 80 percent of farm-raised fish in Nigeria today are catfish. Tilapia is also cultivated and sold in the local market. Fish farming in Nigeria rose from 30,000 metric tons (mt) in 2002 to 84,000 mt in 2007, according to Federal Department of Fisheries (FDF) statistics.

¶5. The fishing industry provides direct employment to over a million people, according to FDF statistics. The current number of catfish farms is estimated at 10,000 in Lagos alone, and over 120,000 nationwide, according to Africa Farming Project National Coordinator Bright Okwo. A

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secondary market involving the smoking and sale of catfish is growing and employs many women. Oguntade also estimated that more than 5,000 new jobs could be generated from local companies involved in fish feed production.

NIGERIA IS AFRICA'S LARGEST IMPORTER OF FISH

¶6. National Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA) President Dr. Simon Okolo said Nigeria's current fish demand is 2.1 million mt but the average domestic fish production is 620,000 mt and fish importation is about 740,000 mt, leaving a deficit of 1.3 million mt. This reportedly makes Nigeria the largest importer of fish in Africa. The FDF statistics on fish imports in 2007 was 739,666.12 mt, valued at US\$ 594 million.

AQUACULTURE HAS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

¶7. Artisanal fishing from local fishermen using canoes, motorized and non-motorized boats constitutes 82 percent of the total domestic fish production. Industrial fishing with commercial vessels is at 4.2 percent while aquaculture, farmed raised fisheries, accounts for 13.8 percent, according to Dr. Akande. Nigeria's aquaculture has an annual capacity of 2 million mt of fish, but currently produces 100,000 mt as a result of stunted growth from poor brood stock selection, Dr. Ayinla said. NIOMR is continuing its research on how to improve the quality and yields of catfish in order to attain the annual capacity. The NIOMR headquarters is constructing a 50-bedroom hostel in anticipation of post-amnesty training of Niger Delta youths on aquaculture and post-harvest technologies.

¶8. NIOMR has asked for USG help in identifying universities with which to partner on aquaculture research. The Mission will follow up with NIOMR and help it reach out to possible partner universities in the United States.

¶9. ConGen Lagos coordinated this telegram with Embassy Abuja.

BLAIR